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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Washington, DC - The House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations released a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report today entitled: Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Progress Made in Improving Security at Russian Nuclear Sites, but the Long-term Sustainability of U.S.-Funded Security Upgrades is Uncertain (GAO-07-404). The report concludes that the billions of dollars the United States has spent over the past 15 years to safeguard nuclear materials at Russian facilities could be wasted if the Russian government does not agree to maintain security upgrades. Recent reports of illicit trafficking in nuclear materials underscore the importance of sustaining security upgrades at nuclear facilities in Russia and other countries.

“Our nation’s first line of defense is to secure nuclear materials inside Russia and other countries by helping them create robust security systems,” said Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. “The next step is to encourage the Russians to fund security measures. Sustaining cooperative U.S.-Russia relations at the highest levels of government will be required to ensure that the recent security gains made at the ground level will remain effective.”

GAO found that local facility managers in Russia are concerned that the necessary funding to protect nuclear materials will not be available after U.S.-funded programs wind down between 2008-2013. Despite concerns, the Russian government has said it will not accept continued U.S. funding assistance.

“We have devoted a great deal of time and money to help the Russian government safeguard their nuclear facilities against security breaches, but more must be done,” said Senator Norm Coleman, Ranking Member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. “Any breach could have devastating consequences throughout the world. As we continue to fight the Global War on Terror, we must all work together to avert a potential nuclear disaster.”

Since 1993, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Defense (DoD), working in cooperation with the Rosatom (Federal Agency for Atomic Energy of the Russian Federation) and the Russian Ministry of Defense, have spent a combined \$2.2 billion consolidating nuclear materials, installing physical security and video surveillance systems, sealing nuclear material containers to indicate whether material has been stolen, implementing accounting systems, purchasing equipment and training security forces. About \$920 million was spent to consolidate nuclear warheads into secure storage sites, and \$335 million was used to construct a fissile material storage facility to house materials from dismantled nuclear weapons. DOE and DOD project that they will have fully secured 210 buildings and 97 nuclear warhead sites by the end of 2008.

As outlined in today’s report, the GAO also found that, in some cases, the Russians have denied U.S. inspectors access to nuclear sites after upgrades have been completed, and subsequently allowed the facilities to degrade. After upgrades were completed in 1998 at SF-Nikiet (also known as the Institute of Nuclear Materials in Tomsk), DOE officials were denied access until 2002 when they discovered that the U.S.-funded security upgrades were “in a severe state of disrepair.” As a result, DOE had to spend \$800,000 to correct problems resulting from the failure in order to properly maintain U.S.-funded security upgrades.

“Although the first line of defense is stopping rogue trade in nuclear materials, we must also ensure that the final line of defense at U.S. ports and borders can detect nuclear materials and suitcase bombs,” said Bart Stupak (D-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations. “To determine whether loose nukes could find their way into the U.S., the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee has also asked the GAO to assess the adequacy of the Administration’s programs to procure and test radiation portal monitors.”

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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